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Ishtalí of Zerrikania



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"Am I to sit here and act miserable, then? Tell me, why? Because I've suffered? Because the world is cruel and filled with nothing but piss and shite? No, no, no, my friend. I'll continue on laughing, and singing, and dancing, and smiling, even in the thick of it. Because it pleases me and if there is one thing to be certain of it's that I will continue to do what pleases me. I refuse to adhere to the notion that life should be defined by misery."

—Ishtalí

Ishtaliareian "the She-Wolf" de Salvat a'Chlan Innanin, the once infamous **Bitch of Nazair**, better known as **Ishtalí of Zerrikania** to the people of [Beauclair](#), is an exiled half-Zerrikanian mercenary originally hailing from [Assengard](#), [Nazair](#). Best known for her unrelenting spirit and a penchant for being exceptionally thorough, Ishtalí traveled the Continent alongside her little brother Sameil Tamzen de Salvat in search of the opportunity

Ishtaliareian a'Chlan Innanin

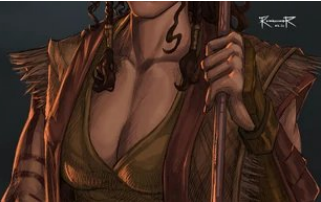


to provide him with a stable and fulfilling life. Together they ventured from the **Dragon Mountains** to **Toussaint**, where the two made the **Silver Salamander Inn** their temporary home before her rising reputation and a growing list of regular patrons eventually caught the eye of Baron Amadis de Trastamara. After performing several tasks for him, including rescuing his youngest son from a spot of trouble, he gifted her a permanent residence in **Francollarts**.

In addition to serving as the Baron's sworn-sword, Ishtalí operates as a sword for hire, taking the jobs **knights-errant** often deem beneath them, and occasionally serves as an armed escort for scholars on expeditions, or for merchant caravans.

Unbeknownst to all but her closest companions Ishtalí is an exceptionally old and powerful **lycanthrope**, the scion of a long-cursed noble house. Both she and her brother were born with the affliction, granting them an innate control of themselves and their transformations. Alongside just under a century of experience in the trade, her inhuman senses and strength give her an edge over most other mercenaries, making her a daunting foe to those who cross her and a formidable ally to those who can afford her fee.

Contents	[hide]
1. Personality	
2. Physical Appearance	
2.1. <i>Human Form</i>	
2.2. <i>Lycanthropic Form</i>	
3. Biography	
3.1. <i>Early Life (1203 - 1216)</i>	
3.2. <i>The Ghost (1216 - 1226)</i>	
3.3. <i>The Wolf and the Manticore (1226 -1228)</i>	
3.4. <i>A Daughter of the Sands (1228 - 1250)</i>	
3.5. <i>Red Chimeras (1250 - 1256)</i>	
3.6. <i>The Bitch of Nazair (1256 - 1260)</i>	
3.7. <i>Of Men and Monsters (1262 - 1273)</i>	
3.8. <i>Ishtalíareian of Zerrikania (1273 - 1285)</i>	
4. Relationships	
5. Religious Beliefs	
6. Abilities and Skills	
7. Trivia	



Portrait of Ishtalí donned in traditional Zerrikanian armor. Commissioned by the author from artist Ronniennoire on Twitter.

Biographical Information	
Born	Mid-Winter, 1203
Birthplace	Assengard, Nazair
Physical Description	
Race	Human (Werewolf)
Gender	Female
Hair	Dark Auburn
Eyes	Copper Brown
Skin	Medium Olive-Toned
Political Information	
Profession	Mercenary, Bodyguard, Bounty Hunter, Fencing Tutor
Rank	Mercenary Company Commander (Formerly)
Titles	Madame de Salvat, Lady de Salvat, Commander of the Red Chimeras (formerly), Sworn Sword of Trastmatara
Affiliation	The Band of the Red Chimera (Formerly), Damyn Black
Alias(es)	Ishtalí of Zerrikania, Ishtalíareian of Clan Inannin, The Bitch of Nazair, The Red Chimera, The Ghost of the Amell Mountains, Saovbleidd
Nationality	Half-Nazarian (Paternal), Half-Zerrikanian (Maternal)
Coat of Arms	A Red Chimera on a Yellow Field
Relationships	
Father	Theoderick de Salvat (Deceased)
Mother	Eristhophite of Clan Inannin (Deceased)
Sibling(s)	Sameil Tamzen de Salvat
Lover(s)	Jehkipe Sastimos (Deceased)
Other	Damyn Black (Patron)

Personality

Despite the appearance of a stoic sell-sword, Ishtalí of Zerrikania is outwardly warm with a

charming though at times blackened wit. She prides herself in being personable and enjoys carousing amidst patrons in the Red Cardinal Inn, and adores attending social events where there is dancing and music especially. Though it may at times appear as though she is free of worry to the point of forgoing seriousness, and while it is true that smiles and laughter are never long gone from her, she is above all else pragmatic and honest, often to a fault. Time has hardened her heart to the girlish fantasies she once held dear, and shown her the dangers of willful naïveté. Yet, in the deeper parts of her she still wholly believes in the basic premise that there is such a thing as goodness in the world and that people are often more than the sum of their parts.

There are limits and exceptions to this. She is quick to act against those that wrong her, occasionally to an extent that exceeds the wrongdoing. This is often the direct result of having been cheated out of her payment, directly lied to, provoked into a fight, or forced into a situation where her bestial self can find no other option. She is not without her scars, both physical and mental with the latter often manifesting in subtler ways. She tackles physical and mental challenges directly, but when it comes to emotional ones she often chooses to make light of situations and then brush them aside, rather than dwell on them. She will often speak of her past in general terms, almost carelessly glossing over some of its darker aspects because she refuses to live her life defined by them.

It should also be noted that no matter how friendly and easy-going she may appear, Ishtalí will actively take steps to keep most people at a distance. This conflicts with another of her intrinsic traits; her love of and craving for music, laughter, and relationships with others that she can then form deep connections with, and who in turn can offer reprieve from the self-imposed responsibility of being her brother's primary guardian and role-model. There is little Ishtalí won't do to ensure her brother's safety, nothing and no one matters to her more than his growth, and her compulsion to protect him borders on the pathological. So much so that her personality almost appears to invert where matters concern him.

Physical Appearance

Human Form

In her travels, Ishtalí quickly learned that most of the men of the Northern Realms and the Nilfgaardian Empire alike could agree on but one thing; they preferred their women pale, supple, and lithe. Anything but and with skin like unrefined sugar, Ishtalí de Salvat is no stranger to the odd looks and whispers that manifest when she passes. As tall, if not taller, than most men and with musculature to rival any warrior, she incites curiosity and disgust alike, especially from the haughtier denizens of Beauclair. She bears features reminiscent of her mixed heritage; dark chestnut hair with a russet sheen that falls past her waist in long, dramatic waves, but is most often braided in traditional Zerrikani style. Her face is proud and long, with slightly upturned eyes the color of burnished copper, high cheekbones, a well defined jaw, and a straight nose which tapers upward near the end. Her body bears several scars gleaned from numerous bouts over the decades which her armor does little to conceal. Most of the marks that mar her body were inflicted via wounds dealt with silver, but others came from particularly nasty blows which failed to heal properly. Most notably a scar which has permanently slashed the corner of her right eyebrow, the result of having been kicked in the head by her horse; the blow shattered her orbital ridge and would have killed a human instantly. About her wrists and ankles are a set of scars from where silver-plated **dimeritium** shackles once bit. Others are littered about, especially across her arms, chest, and back, but many are old and have since faded almost entirely.

Lycanthropic Form

As with all werewolves, Ishtalí possesses another form that she can take at will, that of a large wolf-like creature with a sleek, long muzzle, powerful limbs capable of carrying her on four legs or two, each digit of which are tipped in dark, razor sharp claws made to rend flesh from bone. In addition to an increase in muscle and bone mass, she grows another foot in height reaching something comparable in height and size to a cave bear, albeit far more lean. Where most werewolves, particularly those cursed or bitten, appear to be missing most of their fur in a pattern reminiscent of mange, Ishtalí's lycan form is unique in the sense that it's fully coated and she possesses a fully formed, though proportionally short, tail. It bears a pattern reminiscent of a normal wolf's and bares the same shade of russet

tinged chestnut as her hair in human form, save her underside which is cream colored. Sameil shares these characteristics, being that when transformed he too possesses a full coat, only his is a bit wiry and much lighter, presumably because his coat emulates that of younger wolf. This allows them both to, at a considerable distance, camouflage themselves as a normal wolves, if rather large, provided one does not stare too long or venture closer for a better look.

Biography

Early Life (1203 - 1216)

She was born to Lord Theoderick de Salvat, **The Merchant King of Assengard**, a nobleman whose family was descended from Nazairi Highlanders, and Erishtophite "Tophi" of Clan Inannin, the head of one of Zerrikania's most prominent trading clans. Ishtali began her life as the jewel of House de Salvat, the reigning trading family of Nazair which was famed for their connections to foreign merchants and access to rare Zerrikanian goods. Her childhood passed her by with fairytale-like ease, growing up practically a princess under the careful eye of a doting mother and the protection of her powerful father. However, as she grew older and the fire of her Zerrikanian blood began to burn within her, Ishtali began to stray from the path she had been groomed to follow. She rejected her father's vision for her as the scion of her bloodline in favor of enjoying her youth amidst the common folk and studying music, poetry, art, and history. Tensions between her and her father came to a boiling point when he caught wind of her plans to elope with a

young bard of low breeding. Enraged, her father forbade her from leaving their villa, set guards to watch after her at all hours of the day, and threatened the young bard on pain of death to forget his love for the young Mistress de Salvat. Despite this, Ishtali still managed to sneak out of her father's estate to be with her love. The romance came to an abrupt and tragic halt when the young bard she so deeply cared for became ill with and later died of plague.



The balcony of the Grand Villa of Assengard, prior to the Nilfgaardian invasion. Ishtali's childhood home and the ancestral seat of House de Salvat.

Believing her minor dalliance with the young troubadour to be the peak of her venture into adolescent defiance, Ishtali's father moves on with his plans for her, which entail finding her a suitor so as to marry her off to another powerful family, preferably one that also shares in the secret blood that has acted as House de Salvat's saving grace for generations. Much to her father's immeasurable disappointment, Ishtali refuses any and all attempts to secure her a mate, and even begins to act out in ways that put her family's secret at risk. It was this very show of petulant aggression that sparks the interest of rival lords, drawn in by the rumors surrounding House de Salvat. She is finally exiled when a mob attack meant to capture her and kill her father's men badly wounds her mother who unexpectedly leapt into the fray. The mob was driven away and Ishtali's mother is presumed dead.

In the week that followed, Theoderick calls Ishtali to him, the two shared a drink, and shortly after, Ishtali fell unconscious.

The Ghost (1216 - 1226)

Ishtali awakens inside a cave, far from Assengard and deep into the heart of the Amell Mountains. Outside, a terrible storm raged on for six days and her deathly fear of thunder prevented her from leaving to return home. She realized quickly what must have happened; her father, presumably out of grief for his lost mate, or simply to be rid of his unruly daughter, had exiled her to the wilderness. When the storm was over, she attempted to find her way back home to Assengard, but had no idea where she had been left relative to where her home was. As a child with limited knowledge on how to survive in the rugged alpine wilds of Nazair, she struggled to find food, shelter, and warmth for the first few weeks

after the storm's end, until she finally gave in to her desperation and transformed for the first time since the incident that had exiled her. All her life she had been taught that her lycanthropic nature was a gift and so she employed it for the sake of survival, reasoning that it was a temporary solution until she could find a way to return home. For a time, she used her transformations only to secure food, to travel more quickly, and to keep warm at night, but as the weeks turned into months, and the months became years, she resigned herself to her new life in the wilds. And so, her sorrows became less and less of a concern as she gave herself completely to the animal within her.

Rumors of an enormous she-wolf dwelling in the **Amell Mountains** eventually began to form, which brought human hunters to her in an effort to claim her pelt. She proved so elusive that several myths and folk legends began to sprout up about a wolf spirit that guarded the mountains and occasionally blessed young hunters with courage. This continued for many years, and she was eventually dubbed **The Ghost of the Amell Mountains**, named Saovbleidd by the Highlanders.

The Wolf and the Manticore (1226 -1228)

As the years went on, she began to go longer and longer stretches in her animal skin, years on end, and in doing so began to give in to certain primal urges which put her in the sights of more than just village huntsmen. Ishtalí began to hunt closer and closer to human settlements, killed dogs that attempted to warn their masters of her presence, entire flocks of sheep, cattle, and even a few horses. The local villages tried to appease what they believed was the vengeful avatar of Saovbleidd by leaving offerings of meat, jewels, and animal bones, but this only emboldened her. Eventually, the villages come together to solve their mutual problem and promise a reward of 500 denari for whomsoever could put an end to their suffering. Ishtalí was met in full force by many a young, stupid, and glory hungry hunter and noble sportsman, even passing bandit gangs got in on the action, but as with before none could so much as catch a glimpse of her. Those that did rarely returned and the rarer few who survived the woods were so badly disfigured that they died shortly after being found. Her bloodlust grew enough that she began to actively hunt humans, eventually killing several children.

Word of the Ghost spreads until Ishtalí finds herself hunted by a **Witcher** of the **Manticore School**, and for the first time in years she is faced with a true challenge. The Witcher enlisted the help of a young ranger from the nearby village to lure out what he believed was an angry spirit, only to watch as the bear-sized lupine burst from the tree-line and killed young man. Realizing he wasn't dealing with a spirit, but instead a therianthrope, he moved in to begin a long, drawn out fight. Never having faced a witcher before, but instinctively recognizing the dangers of silver, Ishtalí managed to use her natural speed and ferocity to maintain opposition, but ultimately a feral beast was no match for a learned professional. She was close to death, the Manticore readying to deliver the killing blow when she reverted to her human form, startling the witcher enough that his assault faltered. Taking the opportunity, the badly wounded Ishtalí flees but he gives chase, tracking her to the cave in the mountains that had become her den. Frightened but too badly hurt to retaliate any longer, she collapses in the cave and awaits her fate. Instead, the witcher sheathes his blade and introduces himself as Jehkipe Sastimos, much to her confusion.

Jehkipe quickly discovered that she could barely speak and what she could say was told in broken Common, as she hadn't had need to speak to another person in almost a decade. The Manticore was able to use clues found in her den to paint a fuller picture of what had happened. It became clear that she was abandoned very young and, left to her own devices, the young lycanthrope had done only what instinct demanded. While this did not excuse her actions, nor eliminate the potential danger she imposed on the local villages, Jehkipe took pity on her and asked if she had other family who might be able to take care of her. Ishtalí was uncertain at first, but eventually was able to recall the name of her mother's clan in Zerrikania.

A Daughter of the Sands (1228 - 1250)

Jehkipe agrees to escort Ishtalí to **Zerrikania** instead, first to **Elskerdeg Pass** and then into **The Wastelands**, where they are beset upon by a **royal wyvern** matriarch and her daughters. Jehkipe commanded Ishtalí not to fight, and instead to run while he distracted them, only

for them both to be rescued by a small band of Free Warriors. Jehkipe puts Ishtalí into their hands, and the group escort her to her mother's ancestral home. Though the warmer desert climate proves challenging for someone who had lived her life amidst temperate forests and mountains, she adapts quickly and ingratiates herself amidst the people. She is welcomed by what remains of her mother's clan and through them learns the ways of the Free Warriors. They teach her traditional Zerrikanian songs, poems, and stories which she commits to memory with an almost obsessive hunger, and though they recover some of her lost mental and spiritual stability. She also discovers she has an affinity for the spear and shield over the other forms of traditional Free Warrior fighting styles.

She lived happily with her new clan for many years and even found a few young women amongst them that she trusted enough to share the secret of her lycanthropy with. Through them she learns to forgive herself and accepts that she will always find herself split between worlds, but that she alone chose into which she would cross. Though it pained her to do so, she eventually left Zerrikania, with every intention of one day returning.

Red Chimeras (1250 - 1256)

She returns to the Northern Realms but quickly finds herself going south after falling in with a band of fellow vagabonds, exiles, and adventurers whom she eventually comes to lead. Together they formed the mercenary company called The Band of the Red Chimera, and she adopted moniker **The Red Chimera**.

With all that she had learned from her time with the Free Warriors, she was able to lead her company to fortune and infamy. The Chimeras became well known across the bordering provinces of Nilfgaard and the Northern Realms for being efficient and exceptionally reliable, exalted for never failing a contract, but infamous for being difficult to find and hard to bargain with. Ishtalí steered her company toward vigilante-style justice between major contracts, so long as they adhered to a strict code. Over the years, The Chimeras fall in and out of favor with those who might be in need of their services, but Ishtalí always managed to recover standing, often through her vast network of ever expanding contacts.



Ishtalí in full Free Warrior regalia and war-paint.

Unfortunately, her luck eventually ran out. A series of ill-thought out deals during the conquest of **Metinna** by the **Nilfgaardian Empire** lead her and The Chimeras into dire straits. After one particularly harrowing battle in service to the ruling lord of **Forgeham**, which had resulted in the capture and subsequent execution of one of her lieutenants, a third of the company deserted her and half of those remaining were dead or dying. Despite this, the Chimeras' had won the day for their patron, who in turn decided that they would only be paid for the efforts of the men that still remained. Outraged, Ishtalí demanded the rest of her payment at the end of the sword, a move that resulted in exile from the city. With what remained of her company, Ishtalí lead them into **Geso**, away from the fighting in the hopes they could perform odd jobs but things look bleak. In desperation she borrows money from a powerful crime lord, known as the Pit King, an act that ultimately seals her company's fate. The money proves to be enough to get The Chimeras back on their feet, but leaves Ishtalí with personal debts to pay.

The Bitch of Nazair (1256 - 1260)

Things would never be the same for the Red Chimeras after that. They had been disgraced in Forgeham and their reputation for efficacy and prowess was not enough to repair the damage done. Seeing no other options before her, Ishtalí left The Band of the Red Chimeras under the charge of her remaining lieutenant and became an arena fighter under the charge of the Pit King. An agreement was made between them, whereupon Ishtalí would be allowed to keep half of her earnings from the Pits, while the other half would go toward paying off her debt of nearly 15,000 florens, but, unbeknownst to her the Pit King had been plotting keep her under his thumb. The Chimeras attempt to free her, but with his resources

and seemingly endless amount of gold, the Pit King successfully frames The Band of the Red Chimera for a crime that results in them all being put to the sword, thus severing Ishtali's only lifeline. She becomes **The Bitch of Nazair**, a stage name given to her by the crime lord who had long ago discovered her secret and had been making moves to capture her ever since. He had always intended to lure her to Geso in order to trap her and make her into his personal champion; a beast of spectacle for the arena he owned and had used to build his own massive fortune. It just so happened that she had come to him of her own accord.

She was briefly reunited with the Manticore Witcher during this time, who himself appeared to have landed in a spot of trouble, and this proved to be the one thing that kept her from going completely feral. She and Jehkipe found comfort in each other, eventually becoming lovers. The relationship was successfully kept hidden, or if he was aware of it, the Pit King didn't care to put a stop to it, but both knew that beyond the Arena there was no future for them together. Both Ishtali and Jehkipe understood that one or the other would eventually be killed in The Arena or released from their debts, and so the two often met knowing it may be their last moments in each other's embrace. True to his word Jehkipe left as soon as he was able to buy his own freedom and returned to the Path. Ishtali never saw him again. After his departure, she completely succumbed to her helplessness and rage, living for the arena and nothing else.

Of Men and Monsters (1262 - 1273)

Ishtali found her freedom when an aspiring researcher, scholar, and supernatural conservationist Damyn Black arrived in Geso to study the effects of repeat large scale skirmishes on necrophage populations. While in Loreda, he followed an intriguing rumor that lead him to the discovery of the Pit King and his now infamous Bitch of Nazair. Recognizing quite quickly that Ishtali was some breed of supernatural creature, and not a common pit slave, Black employed the services of a local, small-time guild to uncover just what kind, and then secured a private dinner with the Pit King. During this dinner, Black laid out the information he'd gathered plainly, and made an offer. The Pit King relinquished her without much fight, given the price Damyn had offered far exceeded the debts Ishtali had originally accumulated, and by then the crowd had begun to tire of her. The next morning, Ishtali's chains were struck from her wrists and she was turned over to Damyn with little explanation from her former captor. Black, took her from Loreda to the fortress in Fen Aspra, where he tended to her and explained his intentions.

After having discovered her true nature, that a lycanthrope not cursed but born-- considered a rarity even among rarities--Damyn had decided his thesis on ghouls could wait. Despite how the fighting pits had made her return to some of her old savagery, he understood that her very nature meant she was still more in control of herself than her cursed brethren and therefore she could provide valuable insights into lycanthropic physiology. He offered her a choice, to be given clothes and coin and sent on her way, or to be provided all of that in addition to permanent lodging, and in exchange, she would become a live-in subject for his research. Feeling indebted to the sorcerer, Ishtali choose the latter. He took her to his keep in the Dragon Mountains to be studied and Ishtali, while at first reluctant to indulge him eventually allowed herself to be both observed and physically evaluated to further Damyn's research. In time she returned to some semblance of herself, and through his studies of her Damyn Black achieved high accolades amidst his peers.

Over time and as anti-magic and anti-nonhuman sentiments begin to rise Damyn's research trips grew into more and more dangerous endeavors, more than they already were. The two began to travel together, with Ishtali officially serving as his bodyguard and weapon, under various monikers. They traveled across the continent and into the lands east and south. She deterred those that might have wanted to stir trouble and eliminated potential threats upon his command, sometimes going so far as to eliminate potential rivals without being asked. Occasionally she also helped to procure specimens for Damyn's research, though for this he often preferred to hire witchers, with Ishtali supervising to ensure the specimens remained unharmed. They were not without their conflicts. Though their relationship was at times volatile, her loyalty to him was ironclad.

Relationships

"So it was that she learned the truth of it, of their father's cruel disfavor. The pup's only crime had been a frailty of frame; he was a runt. Unnamed. A thing is not alive until it is named. "Sameil..." she whispered, then bent to lay a kiss on the infant's head. She held him long and knew that before the day was done she would want him more than life itself."

— Ishtali's reaction to seeing and holding Sameil for the first time.

Over the many decades of her existence, Ishtali has known and befriended many individuals. Among her most prominent relationships only a few have persisted over the years and many that have not have lived on in her memories as having had a profound effect on her personal development.

- **Sameil Tamzen de Salvat:** Ishtali's little brother and the last remaining heir of House de Salvat of Assengard. Though, by way of magical preservation and circumstance, the pair are well over half a century apart in age, they do share the same parents and are therefore full siblings. Like Ishtali, Sameil is a lycanthrope by birth and (until recently) can control his lupine form. Ishtali's bond with Sameil formed the instant she laid eyes on him, she nursed him as an infant, let no one, not even Damyn near him the first few years of his life, and until he was 6 he believed her to be his mother. Her instinct to love and protect him supersedes all other desires and often drives her to extreme lengths to preserve what she believes to be his innate happiness. Ishtali considers raising and looking after Sameil to be her final, true purpose in life. To her, nothing else matters and because she can be overbearing, it can and does often cause conflicts between them. He is a bright and generally happy child, who thinks the world of his sister, but recently has shown a growing resentment toward her. Her overprotectiveness has been suffocating his development and her unwillingness to allow him to experience life organically has resulted in a child who is in his heart cheery, kind, and thoughtful, but also aggressive, prone to emotional outbursts, and is slowly losing control of his bestial nature. Conversely, it is in her bond with Sameil that Ishtali's best and worst traits are brought to light, and where she is most in conflict with herself. Simultaneously doting mother, loving sister, silly best-friend, protective guardian, and stern teacher, to say she has taken on the burden of a village on her back would be an understatement. She is almost suffocatingly overprotective and believes that she can, through sheer force of will, keep her brother from losing the spark of child-like innocence that the world around her seems bent on snuffing out forever. This is very likely because, despite having an easy early life, she believes her innocence was ripped from her unjustly and through raising Sameil she hopes spare him the horrors of living in a world that treats them both as foreigners and as evil to be purged. Ishtali has become a master of concealing the true depth of her fears when it comes to her brother, even from herself, and often appears the more level-headed of the two, but she is paranoid and refuses to trust anyone else with looking after his well-being. Ishtali is the most prone to rash action when it comes to matters pertaining to her little brother, known for lashing out aggressively at any form of slight, real or imagined.
- **Jekhipe of Sastimos:** A Witcher of the Manticore School in Zerrikania. He was active between the years 1215 and 1260, presumably having died shortly after buying his freedom from the Pit King of Gesso. He and Ishtali first met in 1217, during his contract for the Ghost of the Amell Mountains; a supposedly vengeful spirit who had been stealing sheep and cattle before finally moving on to hunters, milkmaids, and at least three children. It was discovered that The Ghost was in fact Ishtali, who had spent the last decade of her life in exile and had taken to her lupine form to live in the wilds away from civilization. Still a fledgling witcher at the time, he was not prepared when the creature he discovered was the Ghost turned out to be a werewolf, and though



Ishtali holding an infant Sameil for the first time.

still young herself, she proved quite the adversary. At some point during the fight, Ishtalí reverted back to her human form, startling Jekhipe with the fact that not only was she a female lycanthrope, but she was also a woman of his homeland. Though she was weak from the fight and therefore would have made for a well earned kill, the zerrikanian witcher, bound by a culture he longed to embrace but never could, and his own personal moral code, let Ishtalí go on the promise that she would leave the Amell Mountains and never return. The pair later reunited in 1256 and then became lovers when they were both serving as arena gladiators in Gesso. Their relationship was a whirlwind of passion and lust, born from the mutual desperation to reclaim some sort of agency and to have reprieve from the dire situation they'd landed in. When he had saved enough of his own earnings to buy his freedom, Jekhipe left back to the Path and she never saw him again. Ishtalí assumed that Jekhipe had simply left her to her fate, but the reality was that after returning to the Path he sought ever-increasingly dangerous monster contracts which offered high pay in an effort to free her. He perished in 1257, nearly half a year after his release.

- **Yarlach Iron-Swan**
- **Andrejz Leonhart**
- **Damyn Black**

Religious Beliefs

Growing up in Nazair, Ishtalí was taught to worship the old gods of the Highlander Clans, in addition to the new gods recognized by the wider Northern Realms, such as Melitele. She treated these lessons more so as stories, reveling in the fantasy and mystery of legends old and new. Over time she began to see the gods less as tangible, living beings that controlled the fates and destinies of men, but more so as intangible manifestations of man's morality, hubris, and potential. She saw the gods and their stories and lessons and allegories to be learned from and applied as was relevant to one's life. This served as another point of contention between herself and her father, who firmly believed that their family were descendants of the Highlander Hero-King Lykos of Kkaidya. Though she was fascinated by and actively sought out stories of the gods, she did not actively participate in religious ceremonies, nor did she adhere to any notions of subservience in observation of their festival days.

It was only after she went to Zerrikania that she discovered a religious system that she felt applied to her. The Dragon Cults of Zerrikania worshipped living breathing creatures who possessed actual physical and magical power over the world around them. Dragons exist, they are intelligent and powerful creatures whose lives could span well into the thousands of years, thereby granting them wisdom beyond human understanding. To her mind, these were true gods, or rather, these were creatures worthy of the same reverence granted to the idealized manifestations the Nordlings called 'gods'. Though they are themselves bound by mortal limitations, such as disease and death, dragons were the true living embodiments of immortal wisdom and raw, primal power. While in Zerrikania she encountered draconids, wyverns, and one true dragon.

This said, Ishtalí does not simply throw herself in prostration before the talons of any winged reptile she encounters. Her main exception is for Slyzards, which she states disturb her on a deep and profound level. She does however, refuse contracts for any and all 'dragon hunts' and maintains many Zerrikanian ritual practices during their appointed festival days. One example of such is the annual **Bath of Golden Tears**, a ritual wherein Free Warriors will visit **Temples of Zerrikanterment** to bathe themselves in honey, which is thereafter scrapped off their bodies by priestesses, bottled, and then sold for their supposed medicinal properties. For Free Warriors a harmonized mind and body through self-discipline and self-imposed hardship is the only way they can attain spiritual enlightenment. In turn, Ishtalí believes that through achieving physical excellence and mental fortitude, she can attain spiritual balance which will in turn lead her to the ethereal power innate in dragonkind.

Abilities and Skills

- **Extensive Combat Experience:** Ishtalí has over fifty years of combat experience. In addition to being a formally trained Faithel, she also served as the Mercenary

Commander of a successful sellsword company and has spent the last twelve years working as a lone mercenary. She is capable of quickly assessing violent situations and acting accordingly and is a highly adaptable combatant.

- **Lycanthropy:** In addition to over half a century of fighting experience, Ishtali possesses all of the same traits and abilities as the rest of her lycanthropic kin, with the added benefit of control over her bestial nature. She is capable of leaping impressive distances, maintaining constant motion during prolonged battles, and possesses a powerful regenerative ability that heals all but near-fatal wounds in a matter of minutes.
- **Lycan Endurance:** Her regenerative ability ensures her recovery from extraneous activities is exponentially faster than a normal human's. Her physical strength, which is on par with most other supernaturals, is actually the result of her ability to quickly bounce back from training, which in turn allows her to build muscular strength more steadily and with greater ease and maintain moderate physical activity nearly without pause.
- **Lycanthropic Senses:** As with most lycans, Ishtali's senses are exceptional, and her sense of smell is unparalleled. She can hear a man's heartbeat from a dozen paces and smell his last meal, lover, and everyone he's ever shaken hands with. This makes her an excellent tracker, as she can follow a scent even after most canids would be unable to.
- **Hand to Hand Combat:** She is skilled in hand-to-hand combat and her impressive stature and physique often allows her to go head-to-head with most men.
- **Spear and Shield Mastery:** Her preferred weapon of choice is a Zerrikanian-style spear wrapped in basilisk skin and decorated in cockatrice feathers. The weapon itself is made of ginkgo wood, tipped by on both sides by blackened steel blades that were quenched in the blood of a Royal Wyvern. Each of the spear-blades are spade shaped with pronged indentions made to both mimic the fork in a dragon's tail as well as to catch and snatch way, or even break, the swords of her opponents. This spear is paired with a round shield framed by bronze, with a face stretched over in hardened basilisk skin.
- **Zerrikani Swordsmanship:** Ishtali also possesses a Zerrikanian saberra, her primary choice for close range combat, should her spear be unavailable. Like the spear, her saber is made after the fashion of Zerrikania, wrapped with wyvern leather and was similarly crafted by being quenched in the blood of a draconid.
- **Expert Archery:** Like many Free Warriors, Ishtali also became proficient with the bow and arrow during her time in Zerrikania, capable of firing with deadly accuracy even whilst astride her war-horse. Despite this, she rarely uses her archery skills, preferring to tackle most threats head on as the situation demands. Thus, her bow often only sees action when she is in need of a meal, or when a bounty of hers has escaped farther than she is willing to give chase.
- **Transformation:** Though she prefers to keep to her human form during physical altercations, she can at any time transform into her lycanthropic one. In this form she gains a boost to endurance, speed, strength, and physical resistance. Whatever the form, Ishtali's abilities increase in accordance with the phases of the moon, with the three nights of the full moon providing her a massive surge of mental and physical sharpness.
- **Competent Singer:** Outside of her physical abilities Ishtali possesses an untrained, though very competent singing voice and though her voice has been said to be better suited toward slower and more melancholic music, she prefers war-ballads, tavern jigs, and anything with a lovely bounce to it. She is well versed in a form of Zerrikanian singing which is often ornamented with long trills and legato shifts between scaled notes.
- **Polyglot:** She knows how to speak, read, and write several different languages to varying degrees. The languages she speaks are most prominently the Zerrikanian dialect and the Common Tongue. During her time as a mercenary-commander she picked up passable Nilfgaardian, a bit of Elder Speech while working with Damyn, and was once fluent in Old Nazari, the language of her father's Highlander Ancestors. Currently, Ishtali is attempting to learn Toussaintois with modest success. She speaks with a very soft Zerrikanian accent which naturally deepens during moments of heightened emotion.

Trivia

- Ishtali's name is a reference to Ishtar, the Mesopotamian Goddess of Love, Sex, War, Political Power, Justice, Fertility, and the Queen of Heaven. Other aspects, such as the wing-like pattern she sometimes incorporates in her war-paint designs, her profession, and her preference for spear fighting also allude to Ishtar.
- The second half of her Zerrikanian name, Ishtaliareian comes from an epithet given to Aphrodite as she was worshipped in Sparta; Aphrodite Areia, or 'Aphrodite the Warlike', expressing that in Sparta she was worshipped both as a goddess of love and a war-goddess.
- Her connections to Ancient Greece do not end there. Her mercenary company's sigil, the Chimera, was a female fire-breathing monster, which, according to the Homeric poems, was of divine origin. The fore part of her body was that of a lioness, and the hind part that of a dragon, while the middle was that of a goat. In some instances, she is also considered the counter-part to the Manticore.
 - *In a story she tells to her brother just before they reach Toussaint, Ishtali speaks of an ancient king named Lykos of Kkaidya who defied the god of the skies Zu'dinn and was cursed to walk the earth as a monstrous wolf-like creature. This is a reference to the myth of King Lycaon of Arcadia, who is often attributed with being the originator of werewolf mythology, his name even contributing to the word lycanthropy.*
 - *Ishtali also uses this myth to explain away her fear of thunderstorms and other similarly loud noises.*
- Ishtali's accent is Zerrikanian and not Old Nazarian because she relearned Zerrikanian before she fully relearned Common.
- Unbeknownst to her, Jehkhipe had gone on to take high-profit and increasingly dangerous contracts in an effort to earn enough money to pay off the rest of her debt and buy her freedom. Unfortunately, he was killed on one such a contract.
- Ishtali's overprotectiveness of Sameil and the way it manifests appears to have become pathological and may very well be the result of her own underlying psychological trauma.
 - *Notably, Ishtali bares an almost phobic resentment toward other **therianthropes**, particularly those which have been cursed. Those born with the affliction as she was are not spared her ire, but she openly admits this is a direct result of the instinct to protect her brother.*
 - *She is also especially wary of **werebears**, but where she may display aggressive behavior and even possesses violent tendencies toward other werewolves, she will completely avoid, even run away from, werebears.*

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